Interview with Robert F. Ellsworth

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT F. ELLSWORTH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: June 4, 1991

This is an interview with Ambassador Robert F. Ellsworth to be done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give me a bit about your background, where you were educated, and any interest or studies you had in foreign affairs.

ELLSWORTH: Yes, I really didn't have any studies in foreign affairs. I was educated as an engineer at the University of Kansas, and as a lawyer at the University of Michigan Law School. But I certainly got interested in foreign affairs in World War II and then again in the Korean conflict; in both those conflicts I was a volunteer in the Navy. In World War II I ended up serving— after the war was technically over—in minesweepers in the Pacific cleaning up, interestingly, our own magnetic mines from our own B- 29s off the coast of China. And then in the Korean conflict I ended up for the most part in the Atlantic fleet and specifically in the Sixth Fleet.

Q: Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

ELLSWORTH: In the Mediterranean, so all of that gave me quite a lively interest in foreign affairs, and especially in peace, is the background. It seemed to me—I was just a kid—that

it was a terrible shame that we'd gotten into this war; as kids often do feel that way. But I really did feel that way, and I felt that if, in the future, I should have an opportunity to do something about avoiding wars, and resolving conflicts, that I would do that.

Q: You served in Congress from 1961 to 1967?

ELLSWORTH: That's right.

Q: What district, and what state?

ELLSWORTH: First the Second District, then the Third District of Kansas because the districts were redrawn after the 1960 census. It was east central Kansas. It included the Kansas City, Kansas, area; it included the residential Gold Coast of the whole Kansas City metropolitan area—that is Johnson County, Kansas. It included the University of Kansas at Lawrence, and it included, if you will, what they called the milk shed of the Kansas City metropolitan area that provided farm produce for the metropolitan area in east central Kansas. So it was an interesting district to represent. In Congress I wasn't on any of the committees that were directly involved with foreign affairs, but I was on the House NATO Task Force, and that was interesting.

Q: Which party?

ELLSWORTH: I was a Republican.

Q: Did any foreign policy issues come up during your campaigns, or anything like that, from your district, or were you given any messages from your district on foreign policy?

ELLSWORTH: Yes. Our district was a standard, conservative district. The issues at that time of course, in the 1960 campaign, the foreign policy issue was the missile balance with the Soviet Union, and the attitudes toward Cuba. And if you'll remember in 1960, Kennedy ran to the right of Nixon on both of those issues. Our district was very down the middle on that. The district was a Republican district, but I expect that we were a little bit to the right

of Mr. Nixon at that time on that issue. And then during the period from '61 to '67, first you had the Cuban missile crisis in 1962; then you had the Kennedy speech at the American University commencement in June of 1963 in which he said, “Well, we must reexamine our attitude toward the Soviet Union,” and proposed a comprehensive test ban treaty. Then he was assassinated in the fall of '63 and Johnson became president. And Johnson not only deepened our involvement in Vietnam, but also pursued the beginnings of d#tente with his Glassboro summit with Kosygin in 1967. But in our district, I think our district certainly didn't have any left wing, or really any extreme right wing views on those issues. We were very much middle of the road, and down the center with the rest of the country as far as that's concerned.

Q: What was this NATO Task Force in Congress?

ELLSWORTH: It was an informal group of members of the House, no Senators in it, who concerned ourselves with NATO issues. Eisenhower, of course, in the ''50s had consolidated NATO by bringing Germany in, and allowing Germany to be fully armed. But the question still was, well, what about Germany? And you'll remember that Kennedy went over to Berlin in—I think it must have been '61 or early '62—and made his speech at the Berlin wall, “Ich bin ein Berliner.” Mac Bundy later told me that as they flew in the airplane into Berlin, Kennedy asked him, “What shall I say, Mac?” And Mac just came up with that off the top of his head, and of course it was a great success, a very emotional thing.

The question was, “Well, what about Germany? What about Germany's role? What about the United States' commitment?” I mean these were the questions in Congress at that time. It was basically, and fundamentally, a question of refining the details and mastering the nuances of a consolidated alliance which Eisenhower, as I say, had consolidated during his presidency during the ''50s by bringing in Germany into the alliance. That was basically the...

Q: With the Vietnam war commitment getting bigger and bigger, did you find in Congress that this was having an effect on the attitude towards NATO by members of Congress?

ELLSWORTH: No, it did not. Certainly it was a divisive issue in Congress, that is Vietnam was, the deepening and intensifying commitment, as it was in my state and in my district. But, no, I don't think it had any...the only way in which NATO came into effect was the fact that we NATO buffs, and the whole National Security establishment, realized that what we were doing was taking out of our forces in Europe, hollowing out our divisions. We didn't change the force structure of NATO. The number of divisions, the number of air wings, the number of naval units, etc., remained the same but they were all being hollowed out by having personnel taken away from them and sent over to Vietnam.

In the late '60s and early '70s that began to reverse itself, and war hardened and experienced non-coms and officers were coming back from Vietnam into the force structure in Europe. In the early ''60s and the middle ''60s that was one issue. The hollowing out of US forces in Europe when the Soviets, for their part in Central Europe, were not hollowing out at all. On the contrary, continued of course, to build up, and build up, and culminating, as we know in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The other issue that related to NATO, and tied in with the Vietnam situation was, the basic strategic issue that came up in the form of, what does the Vietnam involvement of the United States mean for the United States' credibility in its commitment to nuclear deterrence on a worldwide basis, but particularly in Europe. One side argued—Dean Rusk was the main arguer for the proposition that our commitment, and involvement, and engagement in Vietnam was essential to maintain our credibility on a worldwide basis to our other allies on the nuclear deterrent commitment. The opposite argument, which I urged both when I was ambassador to NATO and later on in the 1970s when I became Assistant Secretary, and then Deputy Secretary of Defense, was that, on the contrary, our over commitment, and over extension in the Vietnam situation, where we didn't really have a reliable ally, and where we did not have a basic national interest; that our over

commitment to that situation undermined our credibility with our other allies around the world because it demonstrated that we were not able to identify and take care of our proper national interests, and that that undermined our credibility with other allies. So those were the two.

Q: How did you, as a member of Congress during the '60 period, view the Soviet threat? Was this a real one did you feel?

ELLSWORTH: Absolutely, of course. I mean objectively a real threat, no question about it. You could count the beans—bean counters—count the tanks; count the personnel; observe the exercises; keep track of the modernization of the weapons; etc. It was a real threat. And read the doctrine, and read the statements of the leadership, both political and military. No question but what it was a real threat. And, of course, the key to it being understood as a real threat was the specific doctrine which the Soviet military had at that time of saying, “Well, we Soviets are defensive only,” but then they would define defense as being a doctrine and a military strategy, and a tactic which on the slightest political sign of hostility from NATO, would justify a preemptive strike against NATO, technically on the military side, as a valid defensive move. It created a very hair-trigger kind of a situation. No, it was a real threat, no question in my mind.

Q: We're trying to recreate the period for the time. How did you feel dealing with this, and obviously you were able to look at papers, talk to people, visit. Did you see NATO being able to put up a defense along the Rhine, or anything like this? Or did you see this thing going within a very short time into a nuclear exchange?

ELLSWORTH: I always felt it would not go quickly toward a nuclear exchange. In fact, I always felt that the posture of NATO was a sufficient deterrent because obviously the Soviet planners, on the Soviet side, under the circumstances that always existed as long as I was there, would never be able to tell their masters in the Kremlin that there was a high degree of certainty that they could get away with an attack. Either, on a purely

conventional basis, because NATO maintained a robust conventional force structure as opposed to the Soviets. Not a dominant, and not an overwhelming force structure, but of course, NATO always tried to compensate for its numerical inferiority with technical superiority. And I always felt that that was pretty solid. But in addition, the military planners in the Soviet Union could never tell their masters in the Kremlin what would happen with regard to a nuclear exchange; that there was a high probability of going to war with Western Europe and avoiding a nuclear exchange. They never could tell them that. So I felt that deterrence would work. If deterrence failed, I felt that NATO would be able to put up a robust defense, and inflict a lot of punishment on an attacking force without going nuclear. But the nuclear thing I always felt was necessary as a part of the overall seamless web of deterrence.

Q: What about the departure of France. That happened during the time...

ELLSWORTH: No, that happened just before I came. That happened in 1967, I came in 1969. The departure of France was designed by De Gaulle to destroy NATO, but it didn't destroy NATO. And it wasn't long—in fact by the time I got there in 1969, there was already extensive collaboration and cooperation between the French military forces and the forces of NATO. And that has, of course, continued and even deepened to this very day. By the time I got there in the summer of 1969, there was a French general posted at NATO SACEUR's military headquarters for the purposes of cooperation and liaison between the French military and the NATO military structure. They were not integrated into the military structure, but what does that mean; because there was this liaison in the Mediterranean; there was extensive and deep and intensive cooperation—joint operations, you might say—between the French navy and the Sixth Fleet; and particularly as far as naval surveillance was concerned. And just a couple of weeks ago, interestingly enough, I presided at a conference in London on the lessons of the Gulf war in 1990-1991. There was a French general present. The question came up, “How did the French forces coordinate, and cooperate, in the Gulf war, particularly in the land attack but also in the air preparation for the land attack, with the allied forces—with the Americans and with the

British?" His answer, and the answer of the British commanders who were there, and of the American generals who were there at this conference, were all the same. There was a little kind of humorous thing—the French forces, which was a light division of Foreign Legionnaires, which acted as a screen on the left flank in an absolutely essential military operation, got along beautifully with the Americans because the Americans forces with whom they had to operate on the left flank were the 82nd Airborne and both the Foreign Legionnaires and the 82nd Airborne were animals and so they all understood each other perfectly. But seriously, everybody said, including the French generals, that there was very smooth cooperation, and coordination between the forces. Why? Because, he said, "For 30 years we've been training with; planning with; cooperating with; communicating with; the British and American forces in NATO." It goes back a long way.

Q: How did you become an ambassador to NATO? You served from '69 to '71.

ELLSWORTH: Yes. I asked President Nixon, the incoming President, if he would consider sending me over as his ambassador to NATO. And he said he'd be delighted.

Q: What was the situation in NATO when you got there?

ELLSWORTH: I would say the Alliance was well established. The Germans were well integrated. The French liaison and coordination was well established. The only problem was this question of the hollowing out of the American forces by sending sophisticated, experienced non-coms, and junior officers back over to Vietnam in large numbers. But the situation on the ground was basically solid. The deterrent was in place. There were refinements and developments always taking place in SACEUR's strategic strike plan. And concerns, as there usually are, about readiness, and about training, and about morale. But the main thing that was going on in NATO, and in the summer of 1969—early 1969 and the middle of 1969—was the question of NATO's attitude towards strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. You will remember, if you stop for a moment, that the very first thing that Nixon did after he was sworn in as President in late January of '69 was—

within 30 days he'd done this—to take a trip to Europe. He went to Germany, he went to Italy, he went to France, he went to Belgium—the headquarters of NATO. He didn't go there just because it was Belgium, but because it was NATO headquarters; and he went to London—not necessarily in that order. The purpose of that trip was to explain to the key members of the Alliance, and to the headquarters of the Alliance, what he had in mind for strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. Why did he do that? Because he knew that the West Europeans depended on our strategic deterrent as the backbone and the central nervous system, if you will, of their national security in the face of the Soviet threat. So he wanted to explain to them that what he had in mind negotiating with the Soviets was not anything that would diminish the capability, and the commitment, and the structure of the American deterrent, but rather what he had in mind was, a mutual limitation on both sides—both super powers—that he hoped would increase, rather than decrease the national security of the West Europeans; both by limiting the technical means of the nuclear forces, and also would increase their security by diminishing the tensions; by addressing what by that time had become the central political symbol of the age which was nuclear weaponry. And that he was going to negotiate with the Soviets, but he was going to keep them fully informed. Not that he would give them a veto over what he could negotiate, but he would keep them fully informed. Basically that was his main charge to me. “Ellsworth, go over there and use your political clout with me which is well known in Washington and in Europe, to make the Washington bureaucracy keep the Europeans informed, and to make sure that the Europeans have an opportunity, and feel that they have an opportunity, to have input into this negotiating process.” So that was the main thing that was going on.

Q: What were your major problems? Where did you have to put your greatest effort in this particular task?

ELLSWORTH: In this particular task, I would say, my greatest effort was focused on making sure that our negotiators would stop in Brussels every time they went over to Vienna or Helsinki for a negotiating session, would keep us fully informed as they

negotiated along, and would stop in Brussels on the way back to Washington. And also to bring State Department officials over, and Defense Department officials, and to make sure that when the Secretary of Defense, Laird, came over that he didn't just talk about Vietnam all the time, but that he talk about this. My main effort was focused on getting our own bureaucracy to really take the Europeans, to a large extent, not 100%, of course, into their confidence and to listen to the Europeans. So that in this process of attempting to reach an agreement with the Soviets on strategic arms limitations, that you didn't at the same time shoot yourself in the foot, as an American government, by undermining their confidence and their feeling of security in the Alliance. That was the main...

Q: Henry Kissinger was not yet at his peak of influence and power, but it was obviously there, and he tended to do things in a secretive manner. Was this a problem with the National Security Council for you at that time of keeping open lines of communication?

ELLSWORTH: No, that was no problem. The problem was the State Department. There was no problem with Kissinger. Kissinger understood perfectly well what was going on, and what was necessary. And Kissinger himself would stop off in Brussels every now and then—flying in his KC-135, and landing all by himself. And I'd go out and meet him, and we'd drive in and then he'd come and tell the NATO council what was going on and then he'd go out and take off again. And he and his people on the NSC staff were no problem at all. The problem was the State Department.

Q: Could you describe this?

ELLSWORTH: Well, the State Department is always the same, I mean, you know, they have their own games that they like to play, and they feel as if everybody should know already what to do, and how to do it. It was just difficult to get them to schedule people to stop off.

Q: Did you have problems with the other ambassadors, say to France, Britain? I'm talking about the American ambassadors who each have their own bailiwick.

ELLSWORTH: Oh, we had no problem with them because what I did (and they were all very interested in what was going on in NATO), so what I did, one by one, I would invite them down, or up or over, or wherever they were geographically located, to Brussels for two or three days, and I'd give a cocktail party in their honor; and then a little dinner party in their honor; and then I'd have them out and have them briefed by our staff; and we'd take them in and meet the Secretary General, and the chairman of the NATO military committee. We went to great lengths, and they would go to great lengths to respond, and they loved it, and they benefited a lot from it, and their staffs. Maybe that was the politician in me, seeing that they would be worried, and that it would be a good thing to have them come in and feel as if they'd been brought into the inner circle and knew everything that was going on. And that was a great success—all of the West European ambassadors.

Q: Did you have to go back and use your political skills within the bureaucracy of the State Department? The EUR bureau to try to get them...

ELLSWORTH: Well, you have to do that but it didn't have much effect.

Q: Did you have the feeling already that Secretary Rogers was not...there is this story, well known, about Kissinger sort of taking Rogers out of the power structure. Did you have this feeling at the time?

ELLSWORTH: Rogers kind of brought that all on himself. I mean he took a very...I don't know what kind of an attitude to describe it. For example, I remember one time I was back in Washington and the President gave a White House dinner, a small dinner with just a few of us. I remember Rogers coming in and laughing in his lighthearted...a very charming man, very intelligent man, and he said, “What in the hell is the NPG?” Well, I mean, for a Secretary of State not to know what the Nuclear Planning Group was, not to know what

the NPG was, and he really didn't know. He just hadn't taken the trouble...this was months and months after he'd been Secretary of State. He'd been to a couple of NATO Foreign Ministers' meetings, so Rogers' attitude was...well, he already knew a great deal about the world and everything and he wasn't going to bother himself to get involved. So I mean I think Rogers brought a lot of that on himself—a devil- may-care attitude. A very charming man, I like him a lot, but good God!

Q: Did you have problems with your allies on Vietnam?

ELLSWORTH: Yes, yes, constantly. I mean the allies would raise this question about—two questions—about the hollowing out of the American forces, and what did that mean in terms of the American commitment, and in terms of a stalwart defense, and in terms of overall deterrence, number one. Number two, particularly I remember the British Minister of Defense, a very famous Labor politician, not only he, but many, many others made the argument that Vietnam was an over commitment, as they saw it, to a situation where we did not have an independent vital national interest other than just this idea of our own credibility. And they made the point, which I think was correct, that our over commitment, and over involvement, actually undermined our credibility in so far as it showed that we weren't quite a sharp as we might be on identifying, and then taking care of our true national interests. I think that's correct. As a matter of fact, I thought it was so correct that before I was appointed to NATO, I had run for the Senate in Kansas in 1966 and I made that very argument myself in the political campaign. I was defeated, but I was running against an incumbent Senator and I still think it was a correct political and strategic argument. Denis Healey is the name I was trying to remember.

Q: Yes, the Minister of Defense. As you were doing this, talking to President Nixon, and as you say, you were close to him, was he giving you assurances that he was going to take care of this Vietnam problem, and sort of "keep the faith, we'll get back to NATO."

ELLSWORTH: Well, he did, and as a matter of fact ultimately— maybe even while I was there—I'm a little bit confused because you know, I went out of the government, and then I came back into the government in '74 as Assistant Secretary of Defense, and then ultimately I was the Deputy Secretary of Defense. But in any case, sometime in the early "70s when in fact NATO was fenced off and made a kind of a sanctuary, both financially in terms of appropriations and personnel-wise. The military and the bureaucracy in the Congress all kind of agreed, “Okay, we've hollowed NATO out enough here in the past. We're going to build it up a little bit and then we're not going to touch it.” So it became a kind of sanctuary.

Q: And the Nixon Doctrine and withdrawal business...I was Consul General in Saigon '69 to '70, and this was the time when the troops were being pulled out.

ELLSWORTH: Vietnamization, that was Laird's thing, Vietnamization; that Vietnamization would turn the situation over to the Vietnamese, and that did begin to happen under Laird. That's true, Vietnamization, I remember that. I guess maybe Vietnamization had started under Clark Clifford but didn't get much of a play until Laird came in and made it central, and Nixon.

Q: How about the Soviet threat, did you see any diminution of it while you were there, '69 to '71 period?

ELLSWORTH: None.

Q: It was a very cold relationship between NATO and the Soviet Union.

ELLSWORTH: Of course, the Soviet Union as we now know under Brezhnev, and what the Soviets now call the period of stagnation. And, of course, Nixon's maneuver with his opening to China, diminished Moscow's room for maneuver on the international political scene. I mean they hated it because it diminished their room for maneuver. So he set the Soviets up with his opening to China, and then he came in and got this treaty with them,

which eased the United States' position in the world. Remember, this was a strategic arms limitation agreement, not a reduction agreement, just a limitation agreement. And it was a very kind of mechanical bean counting thing. It said nothing at all about qualitative improvements. It really limited missile launchers, as compared with what is going on now. We're trying to negotiate in the summer of 1991 a reduction treaty with the Soviet Union which addresses itself to warheads, and missiles, not just launchers. So it wasn't much but it did reduce tensions. It didn't reduce the technical qualitative nature of the Soviet threat, but it eased, if you will, the political psychological strain in the world. I mean the whole Nixon maneuver of the opening to China, and then the agreement with the Russians kind of eased the burden on the United States. It really transformed in some substantial way the structure of the international system.

Q: How did you feel about the troublesome allies, the NATO ones— I'm talking about Greece and Turkey?

ELLSWORTH: Oh, that was a horrible problem, and always a problem but that goes back 450 years. You can't solve that in 1969 or '70. Later on when I came back into the Defense Department, of course, they actually had a little war against each other with the provocation by the Greek thugs down in Cyprus, and the invasion of Northern Cyprus, and the occupation which continues to this day of Northern Cyprus by Turkey. But that's something that's hundreds of years...

Q: Did you look upon Greece as being a real partner in NATO at the time?

ELLSWORTH: They were—of course, Greece and Turkey...I remember when Helmut Schmidt became Defense Minister of Germany. He came to his first Defense Ministers meeting, and there was a break around the table in the formal session, and he came around to Laird and me and started bitching at us—that is the only word— about why didn't Greece and Turkey contribute to the infrastructure fund of NATO, a big multibillion dollar fund that builds infrastructure for the NATO forces and every nation contributes to it in a

percentage that's negotiated. And I said to him, because Laird didn't quite have the answer on the tip of his tongue, I said, “Mr. Minister, Greece and Turkey don't contribute to NATO, they receive from NATO.” And they were receiving a lot of money from us mainly, but also from other wealthier Europeans in terms of military aid. So, of course, they wouldn't contribute to the infrastructure fund because they didn't have the money. Greece and Turkey, you had to deal with them separately.

Q: Separately, but very equally.

ELLSWORTH: Separately, but very equally. Well, it wasn't really equal because they had different sized military, but in all they understood what the balance was, and what the conventions were for 40 to 60, or whatever the balance in a relationship was. And it wasn't easy. I mean, that couldn't be at the center of one's attention at NATO headquarters, although you had to handle it. And the Greeks and the Turks were always good at sending military people, and diplomats, to NATO headquarters who were very sophisticated, and sensible people, and grown-ups, and adults. The real nut cutting, if you will, on the Greek-Turkish conflict, came up down in the southern region and had to be handled by CINCSOUTH who is usually, if not always, an American admiral based in Naples, and it was he who had to work out how to actually have a NATO exercise over the Aegean region without erupting itself into a war.

Q: I know, I was Consul General in Naples when Admiral Crowe was there and he used to shake his head about...I had served four years in Greece so I was familiar with that element of the equation. The historic roots are such that probably it will never be solved. Were there any other major problems that you had to deal with?

ELLSWORTH: Yes, there was another very interesting kind of major problem at that time, and that was, the technology transfer question. Not in the sense of America trying to hold back technology from the Europeans, but on the contrary; the European allies within NATO wanting, for developmental reasons of their technology and of their

industry, to have a share in the big NATO technology projects. For example, there was something called NICS which got off the ground while I was there, mainly done by IBM and Hughes—NATO Integrated Communication System, a whole new structure for NATO communication involving satellites, and computers. In the late ''60s and early ''70s it was a marvel. Today it would be regarded as quite primitive but that was one of the big problems the whole time I was there. How much of a share in that would they have, so they could learn about these new communicating and computer, and satellite technologies? That's not a strategic issue but it was a very important issue. And I would say a problem. It was also a problem because of the fact that the requirements for the NICS, the NATO Integrated Communication System, were at the edge of new technology, and even Hughes and IBM had a lot of trouble coming up with stuff that would work, and would meet the requirements. So that was an interesting part of the job too.

Q: How did you fend off the other countries then that wanted to get in on this?

ELLSWORTH: Well, you didn't fend them off. You tried to get them in to a certain extent. But the answer always was, “Well, if you're qualified here,” of course they weren't qualified, they knew that, so it was always a question to negotiate. But if you couldn't fend them off, what you had to do was try to work with the American contractors, and with the Department of Defense—the Defense Communications Agency—to get it politically so that the Europeans felt that they did have a fair shot at learning a little something here, and would be satisfied.

Q: Did you have any problem—talking about equipment—with matters such as main battle tanks, or airplanes, or rifles, or something, to have the brief that you were to push American equipment even if you found that NATO was producing something better?

ELLSWORTH: No, a lot of that came up in the middle and late ''70s, but it did not begin to come up in the time that I was there. American military technology was so obviously

superior to everybody that there was just no problem. I mean, for example, take the F-4 airplane which today is an antique...

Q: That's the Phantom.

ELLSWORTH: Today it is an antique, but in the late "60s and early "70s it was the dominant military aircraft in the world, and it wasn't until really the late "70s when the F-16 and the F-15 came in, and the A-10 and all of those wonders at that time, and the Jaguar —the Jaguar was just beginning to get talked about...

Q: The Jaguar was mainly a British plane.

ELLSWORTH: A British fighter bomber. But at the time I was there the Jaguar was just a gleam in the eye of some of the British industrialists.

Q: Did you feel under any constraints because of spying. NATO, of course, and Europe, spying is an ancient and honorable profession.

ELLSWORTH: An ancient and honorable profession, that's right. Well, of course, we had our NATO procedures, and we had our special American procedures, and you had to be careful. We had to worry about those things but we didn't have any big spy scandals during the time I was there fortunately. I don't think that was due to my rigidity on fending them off, but the whole system worked pretty well, I think, during the time I was there.

Q: What about your attitude, and those around, towards Sweden? A neutral country, but relatively powerful for a relatively small country.

ELLSWORTH: We didn't talk about Sweden much but it was well understood that Sweden was kind of a sixteenth member of the Alliance, and they were. They had good military equipment. I went up to Sweden and visited their military installations, and their Defense Ministry, and so forth, one time. They were strictly neutral, absolutely neutral, no question about that. But you knew if there actually were a war, you knew where Sweden would

be, and you knew that they would cause major problems to any kind of Soviet military operation in Europe, major problems.

Q: Were there any ties? I mean, did you have a Sweden book and say, "If this happens..."

ELLSWORTH: No, absolutely not. It would be political dynamite to have had that.

Q: So there wasn't any, not covert, but it was self understood.

ELLSWORTH: It was informally understood, and it was well understood.

Q: Do you think it was well understood in Sweden too?

ELLSWORTH: Absolutely, no question, oh yes.

Q: Did they read our textbooks and things like this so they'd know what we did?

ELLSWORTH: Yes, and there's a lot of exchange at military to military level. Not at NATO, that would have been a little bit too dangerous, but between Washington and Stockholm for decades there's been a good exchange, military to military, its well understood.

Q: What about your staff? How did you find...you said the State Department tends to run in bureaucratic ways. Coming in did you find you had support, or did you sort of have to shake up the staff, or not?

ELLSWORTH: No, I had a strong staff. My deputy moved on and became ambassador to Pakistan just a few months after I left.

Q: Who was that?

ELLSWORTH: I can't remember his name. And then I identified a guy that I wanted as my deputy, who was already in Brussels, named George Vest. He was working for Bob Schaetzel as the ambassador to the EC, so I had to be very careful and I talked it

over with Schaetzel, we delayed, but finally I got George Vest to be my DCM. He was wonderful, and I had Larry Eagleburger as my Political Adviser and he was superb; and had Ray Garthoff as my Arms Control Adviser, and he was brilliant and outstanding.

Q: You're talking about people who not only has this program interviewed, but you couldn't ask for a stronger group.

ELLSWORTH: Absolutely. Martin van Heuven, who just retired from the CIA as National Intelligence Officer for Europe, he was on our political staff. Oh, yes, fantastic.

Q: I'd like to move on and touch if we may the international aspects of your time as...is there anything else I should cover in this period?

ELLSWORTH: No, time is passing so I think if you've covered your points, that's fine with me. I think we've covered the main points.

Q: Okay. Do I have a second to touch on your Department of Defense...you became Deputy Secretary of Defense in 1975 to '77, is that right. You had two jobs.

ELLSWORTH: I came in in the summer of '74 as Assistant Secretary of Defense. I think it was in late '75 that I became Deputy Secretary, and then, of course, I left in January of '77 when the administration changed from Ford to Carter because I was a political appointee from the Republican administration.

Q: What were the international aspects of this job as Deputy Secretary of Defense?

ELLSWORTH: Well, the whole spectrum. I mean it was everything. First of all, it was the pits being in the Department of Defense at that time because of the Vietnam collapse; and the rundown in the Defense budget. I was talking to Scowcroft about this a few months ago...

Q: This is Brent Scowcroft.

ELLSWORTH: Brent Scowcroft, who was Jerry Ford's National Security Adviser. He and I were reminiscing the other day—a few months ago—about that time, and we agreed that it was the pits to be in Defense and National Security at that time because it was very unpopular, and everything was running down, and the Vietnam collapse, etc. And, as Deputy Secretary, what I did as Deputy Secretary was, I was sort of in charge of intelligence for the Defense Department which, of course, makes up 80% of the budget and supplies 80% of the people to the intelligence community. And at that time you'll remember we had the Pike Committee which was attacking the whole intelligence community, and the appropriation committees too, so that was a strenuous time. And as far as what was international about it, well, it was the whole world.

Q: Did you feel that our allies were changing in their attitudes towards the United States at this time, beginning to worry about our troop commitment? Our military was in some disarray. We had left rather ignominiously from Saigon. Did you find that you had to be part of a team to go around and say, "we're really with you," particularly in NATO?

ELLSWORTH: We would go over to these NATO meetings. I mean you know there are two big sets of NATO meetings every six months. There's a Foreign Ministers meeting, and then there's the Defense Ministers meeting, and then in association with the Defense Ministers meeting, there's always a meeting with the Military Committee which is the Chiefs of Staff of the Alliance. So you are in constant contact with NATO. You don't have to go and do anything at NATO, you're always in contact with NATO. Yes, there was some of that and, of course, by this time the middle "70s, the period of stagnation in the Soviet Union had really set in, and Brezhnev was really doddering around. And then, of course; there was also politically here at home; there was Ford sitting as President, a Republican, and it was obvious in '75 and early '76 that he was going to be challenged for the nomination by Reagan, the former governor of California, who was way off to the right, and it was for that reason that Ford in November of '74, after Nixon had resigned...Ford and Kissinger went over to Vladivostok and met with Brezhnev to try to get a SALT II

agreement initialed and they failed because Ford was afraid of being criticized from the right. So that was a breakdown in this strategic arms process which Nixon had started in '69, and which the Europeans understood to be in their security interest, and here it was breaking down. Well, what did that mean? And how could you interpret and understand that? So, as Americans, we were on the defensive there with regard to that particular issue, in addition to the collapse in Saigon, etc. So it was a difficult period of time. And the Pike committee with its amazing and shocking revelations, and the Church committee.

Q: This is Senator Church.

ELLSWORTH: ...Senator Church, the CIA as a rogue elephant, and on and on and on, so it was tough. The basic fact was, and in a sense I mean the kind of chaos that you and I have sort of reviewed here in a twinkling of an eye, got the Europeans and the Japanese, and everybody else, to look at their hole card with regard to the American role in the world. And when they looked at their hole card, they could see that, notwithstanding everything; and after all that; America with its military power; with its population; with its resources; and with its remoteness from most of the conflicts in the world; and with its wide ranging diplomatic alliances—I mean friends with the Arabs as well as with the Israelis; and negotiating with the Russians—that there wasn't any alternative. They better stick together.

Q: And hope for the best. Did you have any feeling while you were there, and you had your intelligence network there, that the Soviets were changing?

ELLSWORTH: Yes.

Q: We're talking 1991, and we've seen the absolute collapse of the Soviet Union as an economic structure. But were there feelings then that maybe they were over extending.

ELLSWORTH: There was no question about it, and it was more than feelings. It was an analysis because it was when I was in the Pentagon in the '74-'75 period, that we in the

Pentagon, if I may say so, forced the CIA to radically revise its estimates of Soviet GNP downward from what the estimates had been. And therefore to revise the percentage of burden on the GNP, of the military buildup up radically—up to near 20% of GNP. So I mean it was more than feelings. It was analysis, and you could see it at that time, and we said so at that time. And it even leaked into the press what the Pentagon was saying at that time, and that was mostly, if I may say so, Schlesinger and me saying it. That the Soviets probably were making, and had made, the greatest strategic blunder in history by over burdening themselves with this tremendous military buildup and that it was going to destroy them sometime. We didn't say when.

Q: Did this change our Defense posture at all? I mean was it still considered a hair trigger situation, or were you feeling that things were settling down a little the more?

ELLSWORTH: I think we felt that things were settling down and it wasn't as hair triggered, although you had to have in the back of your mind the thought that, as Brezhnev deteriorated and deteriorated, and the situation in the Soviet Union deteriorated and deteriorated, that you had to have in the back of your mind the thought that, “Well, sometimes when a sick animal is dying he lashes out.” So you had to have that in the back of your mind.

Q: One last question. How did you find, from a different viewpoint of the Department of Defense, State Department response to Defense problems? Had things changed at all now that Kissinger was there?

ELLSWORTH: Just speaking from experience, and with all due respect and even a lot of affection and admiration for a lot of my friends in the State Department—I mean, I've named some of them here—George Vest, Larry Eagleburger, I could name dozens of them. The fact of the matter is that, institutionally, I feel, and have for decades, that the State Department...and probably this is wise for your Foreign Ministry...is a little bit behind the power curve on what's going on in the outer world. The reason I say that's probably

wise for a Foreign Ministry is because if you're too eager to read, and to see changes, and to respond to them, you might get it wrong. And the costs of that could be too great. So I think its fine for the State Department to be reluctant, and behind the power curve, and to be skeptical when people say, “Oh, this is changing, etc., it's different now.” You've got to be careful, and you've got to be a little bit...so I don't criticize them, but that's the fact that we always felt that, and I still do.

Q: Well, probably also a military has to be ready to meet the latest threat.

ELLSWORTH: You have to, you have to be always ready.

Q: ...whereas there should be a certain break because there are many of these things that the best thing to do is just to sit and wait it out. I've just finished interviewing a man who is our charg# in Ethiopia under Mengistu, and he said, really the thing though is just to sit it out, wait it out. The man was at his peak, nothing we could do, and just wait rather than get in there.

ELLSWORTH: He could see the rot, I'm sure, at work. He was right.

Q: Well, I've taken up much of your time, and I really appreciate this.

ELLSWORTH: It's been a pleasure.

End of interview